Chapter 28
CLOP
CLOP
SIR JINSHI.
YOUR POSTURE IS FAR TOO STRAIGHT.
HRM.
AND YOU NEED TO STOP CALLING ME THAT.
WHAT'S THE POINT OF ALL THIS IF YOU KEEP ADDRESSING ME BY MY ACTUAL NAME?
THEN WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE ME CALL YOU INSTEAD?
HMMM...
...GOOD QUES-TION.
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I THINK IT'S BEFITTING, GIVEN HOW YOU'RE DRESSED.
Y-YOUR LADY...?
...MY LADY.
PLEASE CALL ME JINKA IF IT SUITS YOU...
Chapter 28 A Walk Through the City

SHE EVEN TOOK THE TIME TO DO UP MY HAIR WITH AN ORNAMENTAL HAIRPIN.
...BUT THERE'S NOTHING OLD-FASHIONED ABOUT THEM. THE FABRIC, THE DESIGN, AND THE MAKE ARE ALL EXCEPTIONAL.
THESE CLOTHES SUIREN PICKED OUT FOR ME ARE HER DAUGHTER'S HAND-ME-DOWNS...
YES, THERE IS THAT.
LOOKING LIKE THIS, I COULD EASILY BE MISTAKEN FOR A YOUNG LADY FROM A WELL-TO-DO FAMILY.
OH, HAVE IT YOUR WAY.
LET'S GET GOING, JINKA.

...BUT STILL, OF ALL THE NAMES, HE CHOSE "JINKA" ...?
IT'S NOT THE MOST PECULIAR, I SUPPOSE...
...BUT TO GO OUT OF HIS WAY TO INCLUDE THE CHARACTER FOR "FLOWER" IN HIS PSEUDONYM LEAVES ME AT A LOSS FOR WORDS.
IT'S THE SAME WITH "JINSHI" TOO.
A MAN'S NAME WOULD NOT TYPICALLY BE WRITTEN WITH THOSE CHARAC-TERS.
MAYBE I REALLY SHOULD'VE DISGUISED HIM AS A WOMAN INSTEAD.
...I TAKE IT BACK. THAT SHOULD BE AVOIDED AT ALL COSTS FOR THE SAKE OF WORLD PEACE.

35

HERE. A MAP.
HM?
FLAP
SO WHERE ARE YOU OFF TO?
A RESTAURANT JUST OUTSIDE THE PLEASURE DISTRICT.
I'M MEETING SOMEONE THERE.
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT SORT OF ACQUAINTANCE WOULD REQUIRE SUCH A THOROUGH DISGUISE...
...BUT NOT PRYING IS THE WISEST MOVE IF I WANT TO GET BY IN THIS WORLD.
LATELY, THOUGH, I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL AS IF...
...THEY'RE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF MY ATTITUDE TO GET ME TO DO WHATEVER THEY WANT.
PERHAPS A LITTLE THOUGHTLESS PRYING WOULDN'T GO AMISS.

.....!
NOT TOO MANY LEAFY GREENS ARE IN SEASON YET.
I DID GET MY ALLOW-ANCE AND ALL!
MAYBE I'LL SIMMER THEM IN A BROTH WITH CHICKEN!
FWIP
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STOUT
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37

WHAT ...?
DOING SOME SHOP-PING?
YES.
THEY'VE GOT SOME GOOD VEGETA-BLES HERE.
I GUESS HE MEANS IT'D BE ODD FOR A WELL-TO-DO YOUNG LADY WITH AN ATTEN-DANT IN TOW...
...TO PERSONALLY ASK A SHOP-KEEPER TO BUTCHER A CHICKEN WHILE BRANDISHING A RADISH IN ONE HAND.
YOU'RE GOING TO BUY GRO-CERIES... DRESSED LIKE THAT?
OH, VERY WELL.

I WAS HOPING TO COOK THEM UP FOR PA.
THEY'RE SUCH NICE RADISHES TOO.
...HE LIVES IN THAT TUMBLE-DOWN SHACK.
THAT'S WHY, DESPITE BEING A DOCTOR WHO BY TRADE SHOULD NEVER WANT FOR MONEY...
...BUT HE JUST DOESN'T GET THE CONCEPT OF PROFIT AND LOSS.
PA'S BOTH A GREAT PHYSICIAN AND A SKILLED APOTH-ECARY...
EMPTY
CHATTER
カヤ
...THAT CRAFTY OLD MADAM WOULD AT LEAST SHOVEL SOME FOOD DOWN HIS THROAT.
THOUGH I'M SURE IF HE WAS ON THE VERGE OF STARVING TO DEATH ...
CHATTER
カヤ
はた
FWSH

I WONDER IF THE BUSTLE OF THE STREET IS FASCINATING TO A PAMPERED YOUNG MAN LIKE JINSHI.
BUT HE HAS MUCH TO LEARN IF HE THINKS AN ATTENDANT WALKING AHEAD OF HIS MISTRESS IS ACCEPTABLE.
TAK
TAK
FWISH
40

LOOM
WHY ARE YOU BEING SO QUIET?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING ...?
POUT
HE LOOKS LIKE A SAD PUPPY DOG.
BECAUSE I HAVEN'T ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT.
AND WITH NO REASON TO TALK, I'VE JUST STAYED SILENT.
I'M NOT CHATTY AT THE BEST OF TIMES.
HE'S THE ONE WHO TOLD ME TO ACT DIFFER-ENTLY!
GLOM
GLOM

GLOOMY
WHAT TO DO?
!
CRACKLE
CRACKLE
TWO SKEWERS, PLEASE.
COMIN' RIGHT UP!
LET'S ENJOY THESE WHILE THEY'RE STILL HOT.
JINKA.

THE SAVORY CHICKEN SKIN AND THAT BURST OF OIL AND JUICES IN YOUR MOUTH IS SOOOO GOOD!
STARE
KRONSH
OH RIGHT, THE COT-TON.
TAP
TAP
ARE YOU NOT GOING TO EAT IT?
AS YOU CAN SEE, THERE IS NO POISON TO SPEAK OF.
NO.
THAT'S NOT THE REASON FOR MY HESITA-TION.
HERE. SPIT THEM OUT INTO THIS.
GOOD THING SUIREN GAVE ME THIS PAPER TO TUCK INSIDE MY GOWN.

MM!
SALTY AND DELICIOUS. FAR BETTER THAN WHAT PASSED FOR SKEWERS BACK AT THE ENCAMPMENT!
MUNCH
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
WHAT WOULD BRING A EUNUCH TO AN ENCAMPMENT IN A TIME OF PEACE?
I NEVER THOUGHT EUNUCHS WOULD BE CALLED TO PERFORM THE KINDS OF DUTIES USUALLY REQUIRED OF SOLDIERS.
HMM ...?
MUNCH
...WHATEVER THE REASON, I'M NOT GOING TO BOTHER ASKING.
WELL ...
MUNCH

STRIDE
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PEEVED
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STRIDE
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STRIDE
スタ
IT WON'T DO TO BE LATE.
SHOULDN'T WE MAKE OUR WAY THERE NOW?
IT'S STILL EARLY YET.
SHALL WE HEAD OVER TO THAT RESTAURANT, THEN?
ぱん
PAT
ぱん
PAT
ギク
JOLT
...OR ARE YOU TRYING TO GET RID OF ME AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE?
IS IT JUST ME...
...NOT AT ALL.
...AND PICK UP A RADISH AND A CHICKEN FROM THAT STALL.
ONCE WE PARTED WAYS, I WAS GOING TO RETURN TO THE MARKET...
IT'S TRUE.

.....I SEE.
I JUST THINK ...
...THAT IT'S WRONG TO LEAVE SOMEONE WAITING.
YOU DON'T FIND LIFE AT THE PALACE TO BE TOO AWFUL, DO YOU?
.....
46

YES, MY LIFE NOW IS ALL RIGHT.
I ASSUME IT'S A SIGHT BETTER THAN LIVING IN THE PLEASURE DISTRICT.
I'M QUITE FORTU-NATE.
I'VE EVEN BEEN OFFERED A CHANGE OF ROOMS IF I DESIRE IT.
THE ROOM I'VE BEEN GIVEN IS SMALL BUT CLEAN.
BUT...
...I DO WORRY ABOUT HOW MY ADOPTIVE FATHER IS KEEPING WITHOUT ME.
はかん DUMBFOUNDED
WHY ARE YOU LOOKING AT ME LIKE THAT?

...IT'S JUST...
...I'M SURPRISED TO HEAR YOU CARE ABOUT SOMETHING OTHER THAN DRUGS AND POISONS...
...IS ALL.
WHAT A RUDE THING TO SAY.

HE SOUNDS RATHER COMPE-TENT...
...THIS ADOP-TIVE FATHER OF YOURS.

MY ADOPTIVE FATHER IS A MAN OF MEDICINE, SO IT WOULDN'T DO FOR HIM TO CROAK TOO SOON.
FWIP

MILKING PA LIKE THIS TO GET ME TO TALK...
NO FAIR.

IT SEEMS HE EVEN STUDIED IN THE WEST IN HIS YOUTH, AS IT HAPPENS.
HE KNOWS NOT ONLY TRADITIONAL HERBAL REMEDIES BUT WESTERN MEDICINE AS WELL.
SO HE MUST HAVE LIVED ABROAD FOR QUITE A WHILE.

YES, HE'S AN INCRED-IBLE MAN.
THEY SAY THAT HEAVEN DOESN'T GRANT A PERSON MORE THAN ONE TALENT...
...BUT PA IS AN EXCEPTION TO THAT RULE.
...IN THAT CASE ...
...HE MUST BE TRULY EXCEP-TIONAL.
ONLY THOSE HAND-PICKED BY THE GOVERN-MENT ARE TYPICALLY GIVEN LEAVE TO STUDY ABROAD.
BUT...
...DESPITE THESE MANY BLESSINGS, HE WAS UNLUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE HAD HIS MANHOOD TAKEN FROM HIM.
SO YOU MEAN ...
...YOUR ADOPTIVE FATHER IS A EUNUCH?
49

LUO MEN HAS BUT ONE FLAW.
IF NOT FOR THAT, I DARESAY HE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN FORCED TO MAKE HIS LIVING AS AN APOTHECARY IN THE PLEASURE DISTRICT.
YES.
HIS BAD LUCK.
THAT'S THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT.
USING LUO MEN'S STUDY ABROAD IN THE WEST...
...AS PRE-TEXT...
...THE MOTHER OF THE LATE EMPEROR— IN OTHER WORDS, THE FORMER EMPRESS DOWAGER— HAD HIM MADE A EUNUCH.
HUH?
DID I NEVER MENTION IT BEFORE?
DOC-TOR.
EU-NUCH.
MUMBLE
APOTH-ECARY.
SCRATCH ぽり
SCRATCH ぽり

I THINK THAT'S IT THERE.
LOOKS LIKE IT.
THE PLACE YOU'RE HEADED TO SHOULD BE AROUND HERE SOME-WHERE.
AN EATERY ON THE GROUND FLOOR WITH AN INN UPSTAIRS, HMM?
THAT'S WHY HE WENT TO THE TROUBLE OF DONNING A DISGUISE AND MEANDERING THROUGH THE STREETS...
A-HA...
OOH, NOW I GET IT.

SO EVEN EUNUCHS HAVE NEED OF THIS TYPE OF RECRE-ATION.
OHHH...
THE "ODD DUCK" IN QUESTION MUST BE THAT OFFICIAL WHO'S BEEN GETTING ON JINSHI'S NERVES OF LATE.
YOU DO?
YES.
IT'S FROM THAT ODD DUCK... IN THANKS FOR YOUR SERVICES IN THE CASE OF THE CRAFTS-MAN'S WILL.
SHUFFLE
WELL, THEN, I SHALL TAKE MY LEAVE HERE.
WAIT.
I'VE GOT SOME-THING FOR YOU.
SNIFF
SNIFF
CITRUS WATER?
FROM THE "ODD DUCK," YOU SAY?
SHP
52

SNIFF
SNIFF
IT'D BE MORE EXPEDIENT TO ASK SOMEONE FAMILIAR WITH THAT WORLD...
...HM?
...SAY...
ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE REGULARS OF VERDIGRIS?

?
THAT'S CONFI-DENTIAL.
TELL ME ABOUT THEM.
MM.
THE ONES WHO MAKE A BIG SHOW OF THEM-SELVES, AT LEAST.
FINE.
HAAH...
WHAT IF I PUT IT LIKE THIS?

HOW WOULD ONE GO ABOUT LOWERING A COURTESAN'S VALUE?

WHAT A DIS-TASTEFUL THING TO ASK.
GASP
...ESPE-CIALLY IN THE CASE OF HIGH-RANKING COURTE-SANS.
THERE ARE ANY NUMBER OF WAYS TO DO SO...
AT VERDIGRIS, GIRLS IN TRAINING ARE GIVEN BASIC INSTRUCTION IN POETRY AND DANCE.
THE LESS AVAILABLE A POPULAR GIRL IS, THE GREATER THE DEMAND FOR HER, WHICH ARBITRARILY RAISES HER VALUE.
UNLIKE STREET-WALKERS, WHO MUST SEEK OUT CUSTOMERS NIGHTLY JUST TO GET BY...
...FOR A TOP COURTESAN, THE HIGHER HER RANK, THE FEWER HER ENGAGE-MENTS.

THOSE WITH POTENTIAL START OUT DRINKING TEA WITH PATRONS, ENTERTAINING VIA CULTURE INSTEAD.
THOSE WITHOUT PROSPECTS START SELLING THEIR BODIES AS SOON AS THEY MAKE THEIR DEBUT AS COURTESANS.
AND OF THEM, THE GIRLS WHO EXCEL IN WIT, INTELLIGENCE, AND THE ART OF CONVERSATION GROW STEADILY IN VALUE.
BY INTENTIONALLY LIMITING ONE SUCH GIRL'S AVAILABILITY...
THERE ARE EVEN THOSE WHO REMAIN UNTOUCHED...
...UNTIL THEIR CONTRACTS ARE BOUGHT OUT.
...A TOP-RANKING COURTESAN, WHOSE COMPANY OVER A MERE CUP OF TEA COSTS A YEAR'S WORTH OF SILVER, CAN BE MADE.
YOU MIGHT SAY THAT THE DESIRE TO BE THE FIRST TO PLUCK SUCH A BLOOM...
...IS EVERY MAN'S FANTASY.

FLOWERS ARE VALUABLE PRECISELY BECAUSE THEY ARE UNTOUCHED.
MORE-OVER...
ONCE PLUCKED, THEIR VALUE IS IMMEDIATELY HALVED.

...SHOULD A PLUCKED FLOWER BECOME WITH CHILD, SHE WOULD BE NIGH WORTHLESS.

NOW, THEN.
IF YOU WOULD PLEASE EXCUSE ME.
YOU'RE LEAVING ME HERE?
GRAB
YOU'VE GONE TO SO MUCH TROUBLE TO DISGUISE YOURSELF. IF I WALK IN THERE WITH YOU, IT'LL ALL GO TO WASTE.
SMACK

...ALL RIGHT.
I'LL SEE YOU LATER.
I'M SURE I MANAGED TO SAY ALL THAT WITHOUT LETTING MY FEELINGS SHOW.
IT'S FINE.

...YOU SHOULD'VE JUST GONE TO THE PLEASURE DISTRICT.
IF YOU CAME ALL THE WAY HERE TO HAVE BOTH A MEAL AND THE GIRL SERVING IT...
MAY YOUR EVENING BE A MERRY ONE, SIR.